Missouri Department of Mental Health
Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse

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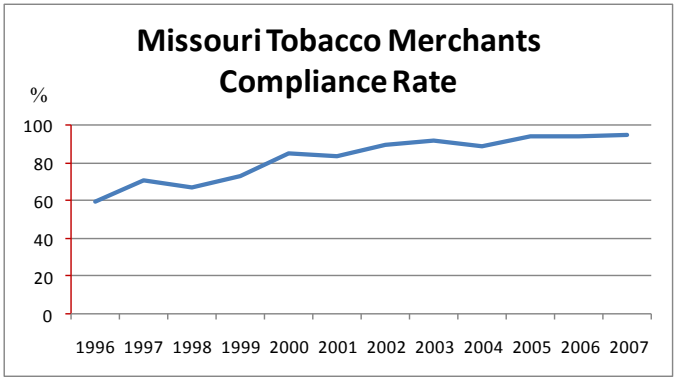
Youth Tobacco Access and Retailer Education

Great Job, Keep up the Good Work!

Thanks to the ongoing efforts of the Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse, Department of Mental Health (DMH-ADA) in conducting compliance checks and tobacco merchants' education, compliance rates among Missouri businesses on the prohibition of tobacco sales to minors have been consistently increasing over the years, from 59.7% in 1996 to 94.4% in 2007.



SYNAR Youth Tobacco Access Laws

The federal SYNAR regulations were enacted to prevent youth access to tobacco products. The DMH-ADA focuses its efforts on ensuring compliance with them by:

- Conducting unannounced tobacco purchase checks
- Educating retailers about the federal and state youth tobacco access laws and ensuring that the Missouri tobacco merchants' non-compliance rate is kept below 20%
- Conducting an Annual Synar Survey to measure the state's non-compliance rate

Tobacco Retailer Education

Decreasing the non-compliance rate among tobacco merchants in Missouri can be attributed in part to retailer education about Synar youth access laws. The Department of Mental Health–Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse conducts year-round retailer education including periodic informational mailings to tobacco retailers. Just last year alone, the DMH-ADA distributed over 6,500 "age checker" calendars.

Youth Tobacco Purchase Checks

Fewer and fewer underage youth are able to purchase tobacco products from Missouri retailers. The Division of DMH-ADA conducts year round compliance checks visiting approximately 4,000 retail outlets per year. In 2006-2007, of the 3,800 completed compliance checks, 264 (6.94%) resulted in the issuance of yellow caution cards to tobacco merchants.

A purchase check consists of having an underage youth attempt to purchase tobacco products. When a clerk refuses a tobacco sale to the minor, he/she is given a green CONGRATULATIONS card. If the clerk fails to refuse the tobacco sale, he/she is presented with a yellow CAUTION card. In both cases, a follow-up letter is sent to the store manager. Tobacco purchase checks by DMH-ADA do not constitute law enforcement action but are to increase awareness of the need to comply with the law.

Prevention Team Walk-In Visits

Ensuring that all tobacco merchants in Missouri have information on current regulations and are in compliance, requires keeping up with their contact information. DMH-ADA contracted prevention teams made over 16,670 phone and in-person contacts during 2006-2007. Prevention teams distributed merchant education materials to the previously identified as well as new tobacco retailers and discussed merchant training with managers and/or owners of approximately 5,500 tobacco retailers.

DMH-ADA Prevention teams make phone contacts and walk-in visits to tobacco retailers to:

- Provide information regarding the state's law on youth access to tobacco products
- Distribute state law signs to be displayed at every tobacco display
- Identify new businesses that sell tobacco and also the current ones that no longer do or are out of business
- Update retail outlet's name and address information

Sources:

1. Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: http://prevention.samhsa.gov/tobacco
2. Missouri Prevention, Missouri Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse: http://www.missouriprevention.org/

For more information please contact the Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse at (573)751-4942 or email: adamail@dmh.mo.gov